

DETAILED ACTION

1. This action is in response to amendments received 3/14/2011. Claims 1-3, 5, 21, 23, and 34 are pending in the application, with claims 1, 21, and 34 currently amended.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

2. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

3. Claims 1-3, 5, 21, 23, and 34 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. 5,766,076 to Pease et al. (hereinafter Pease) in view of U.S. 6,682,421 to Rowe et al. (hereinafter Rowe), "What are relational databases?", and U.S. 6,254,483 to Acres (hereinafter Acres). It is noted that the Acres reference is already of record.

Regarding claims 1, 21, and 34, Pease teaches a gaming system comprising a central authority (central computer system 106) and a plurality of gaming machines (e.g. gaming devices 108a-108c), wherein the gaming machines are configured to receive balance data (e.g., player tracking card account balance; see at least 3:61-4:9), and wherein the gaming machines are configured to generate meter data, jackpot data, and player data (see at least 3:37-4:9 and 5:47-60), apparatus for providing data storage and communications between the gaming machines and the central authority comprising:

- A first database located in the central authority, wherein the first relational database comprises a meter table, a jackpot table, a player table and a balance table (see at least 3:37-4:9 and 5:47-60);
- Accounting module software (7:53-59 and 9:18-34), wherein the accounting module software requires that data be arranged in one or more useable formats in order to generate an audit report based on that data (it is axiomatic that accounting software requires data to be in a usable format; were the data not in a useable format, the accounting software would not be functional);
- A network (see at least Fig. 1); and
- A data processing unit (e.g., gateway processor 138) spaced apart from the first database and comprising:
 - A second relational database comprising a local meter table, a local jackpot table, a local ticket table, a local player table and a local balance table (e.g., data stored in the gateway processor 138; the term “table” is interpreted as a collection of data); and a programmed hardware (the gateway processor) configured to provide a poller function and a data mover function, wherein:
 - 1) The poller function is configured to poll each of the gaming machines to obtain meter data, jackpot data, and player data generated by the gaming machines over the network (e.g., the use of polling as described in at least 3:37-4:9 and 6:12-23), the poller

function being further arranged to format, without human intervention, the obtained data in a format usable by the accounting module software before storing the formatted data in a corresponding local meter table, local jackpot table, and local player table (in the case of Pease, the data stored is at one point in time in a format usable by accounting module software according to 7:53-59 and 9:18-34),

- 2) The data mover function is configured to periodically transmit at least a portion of the formatted meter data, formatted jackpot data, and formatted player data from the second relational database to the first relational database over the network (e.g., data sent between the gateway processor 138 and the central computer system 108), whereby the periodically transmitted meter data is stored in the meter table, the periodically transmitted jackpot data is stored in the jackpot table, the periodically transmitted output ticket data is stored in the ticket table, and the periodically transmitted player data is stored in the player table,
- 3) The data mover function is further configured to periodically retrieve input balance data from the first database over the network independently of a request by any of the gaming machines, whereby the periodically retrieved balance data is stored in the local balance table (because Pease teaches polling as a means for

data transfer, information is transmitted on a periodic basis regardless of any request), and

4) The poller function is further configured to transmit at least a portion of the periodically retrieved balance data from the second database to the gaming machines over the network when said portion is required by the gaming machines (e.g., by sending balance information for the player tracking system);

- The accounting module being arranged to evaluate the formatted and periodically transmitted data stored in at least one of the tables of the first relational database to automatically generate a gaming activity audit report for the plurality of gaming machines (e.g., the central computer system 108; see 7:53-59 and 9:18-34 for audit information).

Pease teaches the invention substantially as described above. Pease additionally teaches that player tracking systems are known in the art and may include a card bearing encoded information, wherein the card is purchase by a player and may be linked to an existing account (see at least 3:37-4:9). Pease lacks in explicitly teaching that a ticket is generated at a gaming machine. In a related disclosure, Rowe teaches that as technology in the gaming industry progressed, “the traditional method of dispensing coins or tokens as awards for winning game outcomes [was] supplemented by ticket dispensers which print ticket vouchers that may be exchanged for cash or accepted as credit of indicia in other gaming machines for additional game play. An award ticket system, which allows award ticket vouchers to be dispensed and utilized by

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other gaming machines, increases the operational efficiency of maintaining a gaming machine and simplifies the player pay out process. An example of an award ticket system is the EZ pay ticket system by International Game Technology of Las Vegas, Nev.” See col. 1, lines 36-47. Rowe further teaches, “An important component of an award ticket system is the ticket validation process. Typically, a game player's satisfaction with an award ticket system is based upon the ease by which the ticket vouchers may be validated or utilized within the context of game playing. When the ticket validation process is difficult, a game player may become dissatisfied with the game playing area offering the award ticket system and frequent a game playing area without an award ticket system or a game playing area offering a simpler ticket validation process.” See col. 1, lines 56-65. Finally, Rowe teaches that all of the gaming machines print ticket vouchers, which may be exchanged for cash or accepted as credit of indicia in other gaming machines (2:5-7). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of invention to modify the system taught by Pease to generate tickets at the gaming machine as taught by Rowe in order to provide increased operational efficiency of maintaining a gaming machine and simplify the player pay out process, thereby increasing player satisfaction as taught by Rowe.

The combined teachings of Pease and Rowe teach the invention substantially as described above, including respective teachings of the use of databases to store relevant gaming data. For instance, Pease suggests an embodiment that additionally employs “dial-up database services and the like or permanent-node internet

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communications or database service communications” (10:23-35). Furthermore, Rowe teaches that after a ticket voucher is cashed out, “the CVT marks the ticket paid in a database to prevent a ticket voucher with similar information from being cashed multiple times” (2:31-34). While both references teach the use of 'databases', neither is specifically termed a 'relational database.' In a related disclosure, “What are relational databases?” teaches that relational databases have been “a staple of business computing from the very beginning of the digital era,” noting E.F. Codd is credited with the creation of relational databases in 1970 (p. 1). The document teaches that the difference between tab-delimited, or “flat”, databases and relational databases is simply one of tabulation: While the flat database creates “one long text file,” the relational database uses tables to store information. Finally, the document recognizes that relational databases are beneficial in that they use “the relationship of similar data to increase the speed and versatility of the database” (p. 2). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of invention to modify the invention taught by Pease and Rowe to utilize relational databases in order to increase speed and versatility of databases, as is favorably taught by “What are relational databases?”.

The combined teachings of Pease, Rowe, and “What are relational databases?” demonstrate the invention substantially as described above, but lack in explicitly teaching wherein the data generated by the gaming machines is not arranged in any of the one or more usable formats until the poller function formats the obtained data. In a related disclosure, Acres teaches a method and apparatus for controlling the cost of

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playing an electronic gaming device over a network. Acres teaches a number of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) that are connected over a network. There is further provided a central system (e.g., accounting system 38) storing various gaming information and player tracking data. Acres further shows a translator 36 that comprises a compatibility buffer between the concentrator and the accounting system 38. The translator “functions to place all the data gathered from each of the bank controllers into a format compatible with accounting system 38” (4:22-24). This illustrates that the data gathered from the gaming machines via the bank controllers is not in a format that is compatible with the accounting system until it is translated. It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of invention to modify the combination of Pease, Rowe, and “What are relational databases?” to incorporate the translator feature of Acres in order to provide the ability to use various different types of gaming machines which would otherwise be incompatible with accounting software and/or to provide the ability to use various different types of accounting software which would otherwise be incompatible with the gaming machines.

Further regarding claim 34, Pease teaches the recited dividing of gaming machines into a first group and a second group at least by the teaching that multiple casinos, each having a group of gaming machines, may communicate in substantially the same way with a respective gateway processor (see at least 1:65-2:19).

Regarding claim 2, Pease teaches a first network between the gaming machines and the second database, and a second network between the second database and the first database (see at least Fig. 1).

Regarding claim 3, Pease teaches a first processor arranged to manage the first database and a second processor arranged to manage the second database (see at least 5:40-41 and 5:61-66).

Regarding claims 5 and 23, Pease teaches wherein the data mover function is further configured to retrieve from the first relational database at least one of output ticket data, player data, jackpot data and meter data generated by the gaming machines within a predetermined preceding time period (see at least 5:56-60, 6:24-7:2, 8:13-18).

Response to Arguments

4. Applicant's arguments filed 3/14/2011 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

Pages 9-12 of the Remarks section address the rejection of claim 1 with respect to the issue of the poller function configured to poll each of the gaming machines to obtain data generated by the gaming machines. The Examiner had previously noted that Pease teaches these features based upon the fact that Pease's gateway processor 138 receives data from the gaming machines over a token ring connection 144 (see 5:44-47). The Examiner noted that token ring networks are polling networks by definition, as each device receives a "token" that allows it to begin transmission during that poll cycle.

Applicant contends that Pease shows the gateway processor 138 receiving information from the casino system "over a token ring connection 144" but argues that the gaming machines 108a-108c of Figure 1 are not on the token ring network (Remarks, p. 10). The Examiner respectfully disagrees with this line of reasoning.

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Pease teaches that “the gaming devices 108a, 108b, 108c in a casino (or other grouping) are coupled to a computer network, such as a token ring network 118, providing information to a plurality of computers such as PC-type computers” (5:25-28).

This demonstrates that the particular token ring network illustrated in Figure 1 is not limiting. Indeed, Pease explicitly teaches that the “[g]aming terminals can be coupled to the controller 114 in topologies other than a daisy chain fashion, such as...a ring topology...as will be apparent to those of skill in the art” (3:33-36). Therefore, even assuming *arguendo* that the invention of Pease’s Figure 1 did not show the gaming machines being polled, Pease teaches that the gaming devices can be part of the token ring architecture connecting the casino system to the gateway processor 138.

Moreover, one of ordinary skill would find this an even more efficient system than that of Figure 1 because only one token ring network would be required for the entire casino site 102, as opposed to one token ring network and one or more other networks.

The Examiner further submits that the gaming machines of Figure 1 are ‘polled’ by virtue of the fact that they are, in one embodiment, only connected to the gateway processor through a token ring connection provided through the front end controller 114. While the claimed invention requires the poller function to be configured to poll each of the gaming machines to obtain data generated by the gaming machines, there is no indication that this is done on an individual basis. Therefore, even if all data relating to the gaming machines passes through the front end controller 114, the controller is itself on the token ring network, and thus subject to polling.

Applicant's additional arguments (see p. 12-16) relating to the formatting of data in one or more useable formats have been considered but are moot in view of the new grounds of rejection with respect to the Acres reference. Specifically, the Acres reference demonstrates that data generated by gaming machines is not in a format that is usable by the accounting system. The data must first be translated by way of a translator in order to provide compatibility between data output by the gaming machines and the accounting system.

It is additionally noted that the amended claim limitation "the accounting module software requires that data be arranged in one or more usable formats in order to generate an audit report based on that data" does not materially alter the scope of the claimed invention as compared to the prior art. As is noted above in the grounds of rejection, it is axiomatic that a given piece of software requires data be arranged in a useable format. Were the data formatted in an unusable format, there would be no way for the software to function.

In view of the above response, the claimed invention is deemed unpatentable over the cited prior art.

Conclusion

5. Applicant's amendment necessitated the new ground(s) of rejection presented in this Office action. Accordingly, **THIS ACTION IS MADE FINAL**. See MPEP § 706.07(a). Applicant is reminded of the extension of time policy as set forth in 37 CFR 1.136(a).

A shortened statutory period for reply to this final action is set to expire THREE MONTHS from the mailing date of this action. In the event a first reply is filed within TWO MONTHS of the mailing date of this final action and the advisory action is not mailed until after the end of the THREE-MONTH shortened statutory period, then the shortened statutory period will expire on the date the advisory action is mailed, and any extension fee pursuant to 37 CFR 1.136(a) will be calculated from the mailing date of the advisory action. In no event, however, will the statutory period for reply expire later than SIX MONTHS from the date of this final action.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to WILLIAM H. MCCULLOCH JR whose telephone number is (571)272-2818. The examiner can normally be reached on M-F 9:00-5:30.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, David Lewis can be reached on (571) 272-7673. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

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Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

/W. H. M./
Examiner, Art Unit 3714
5/20/2011

/DAVID L LEWIS/
Supervisory Patent Examiner, Art Unit 3714